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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: MFA HINTS AT AN EXTENDED TFG TRANSITION

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu told Ambassador Yamamoto and visiting Director of the Office of East African Affairs James Knight that the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah is working on a plan to extend Somalia's "Transitional" period by an additional 18 months to allow for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to advance national reconciliation and engage substantively on the actions envisioned in the transitional Charter. Echoing previously reported Ethiopian Government (GoE) complaints about Ethiopia bearing the burden of sustaining the TFG process and Somali security in the absence of adequate international community support, Tekeda warned that the world could "wake up one day to find Ethiopia having pulled out" of Somalia. Tekeda expressed equal frustration at the TFG's "lack of seriousness," particularly by TFG President Yusuf. Failure to handle Somalia well, Tekeda concluded, could prompt the broad resurrection of extremist elements to seize control of Somalia's precarious situation. End Summary.

YOU MAY NOT HAVE ETHIOPIA TO KICK AROUND ANYMORE

12. (C) Dr. Tekeda opened the April 10 working lunch discussion on Somalia by noting that "if the international community doesn't step up to the plate (save for the U.S.), it could wake up one day to find that Ethiopia has pulled out of Somalia, because Ethiopia has no national interest to stay in Somalia for the long term." Pre-empting the argument of detractors, Tekeda emphasized that there is no chance that the GoE is trying to impose a puppet government in Somalia because the TFG wouldn't last if viewed as an Ethiopian "stooge." Tekeda briefly acknowledged the utility of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) if fully deployed, but immediately emphasized that Ethiopia (and the international community) cannot afford to put all of its eggs in one basket. Instead, Tekeda highlighted the need to train TFG police and military officers not only in tactics, but also in discipline as the only sustainable way to support security within Somalia. MFA Chief of Staff Abdeta Dribssa highlighted that Ethiopia is currently training 1,100 TFG police and a similar number of TFG troops. When asked if the trained forces would be paid, Abdeta defensively noted that the previous TFG "deserters" had been trained in Somalia, and so lacked discipline, which would not be the case for

Ethiopian trained forces.

¶3. (C) Tekeda next expressed the GoE's frustration with the TFG's "lack of seriousness," noting particularly the case of TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf. Providing a comparative analysis, Tekeda noted that at least Prime Minister Nur Adde is attempting to broker reconciliation and governance, whereas former Prime Minister Gedi, though a friend of Ethiopia, was single-minded in his focus to amass personal wealth. Tekeda noted that the southern Somali trend diverged notably from that observed in Somaliland where a sincere commitment to governance does exist., He hypothesizing that Somaliland's English colonial influence left clan dynamics and the people's accountability to clan elders largely intact, while the Italian influence in southern Somalia largely decimated the internal discipline maintained by clans. Abdeta posited that Somaliland's relative lack of meddling by external players may also contribute significantly to the distinct approach by those in power.

A TRANSITION EXTENDED?

¶4. (C) When asked whether he viewed the TFG as a viable entity capable of achieving the actions laid out in the transitional Charter, Dr. Tekeda instead disclosed that SRSG Ould-Abdallah had been intensively engaged in a process of dialogue with Somali opposition entities about the possibility of extending the transitional period in Somalia by an additional 18 months beyond the originally envisioned five year period. Instead of a notional concept, however, Tekeda went into a fair amount of detail in what a compromise encompassing such an extension might include. Tekeda specifically noted that 1) certain benchmarks of progress

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would be established in advance, 2) moderate previous Members of the TFG Parliament -- approximately 30 in number -- would return to Parliament and would be joined by an additional 50 new MPs, and 3) President Yusuf's term in office would be extended through the additional 18 months.

¶5. (C) If not handled well, Tekeda warned, the former Council of Islamic Courts and associated extremists could exert control. Avoiding this would require a delicate balance composed of 1) restraining the "muscular" approach while 2) taking care in just how inclusive an "all inclusive" process should be allowed to be. Tekeda made clear that the inclusion of Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys would be a non-starter and that a too inclusive process risked exposing the effort to a stronger, negative role by Eritrea. Disclosing just how far along this initiative had moved, Tekeda noted that Ould-Abdallah is pushing Djibouti to provide a venue for the rapprochement effort, but that Saudi Arabia could play a useful role and Jeddah or Mecca may be sought as a venue for a final meeting to conclude the arrangement. While an agreement signed at the Muslim world's holiest city is attractive, the Saudi hosts could insist on the inclusion of Aweys. Tekeda argued that the inclusion of Aweys in such an agreement would be a non-starter, but if Aweys remained excluded, President Yusuf's buy-in would be possible.

OPPOSITION PERSONALITIES

¶6. (C) Tekeda noted that former CIC Chairman Sheikh Sharif remains beholden to Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki (due to the provision of two villas and allowing Sharif two wives) and, as such, remains fairly inflexible. Former TFG Parliament Speaker Sharif Hassan is more flexible. SRSG Ould-Abdallah, Tekeda stated, wants to keep these two together in an effort to avoid the fracturing of the Somali opposition into splinter groups. The challenge, therefore, according to Tekeda, is to get Sheikh Sharif out of President Isaias' influence.

17. (C) Tekeda noted that Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin's interventions have been successful in positively influencing Yusuf and Nur Adde to collaborate, stressing that "there is no alternative to Nur's approach" of reconciliation. Nevertheless, Tekeda warned that the approach is not guaranteed.

18. (C) When asked to speculate on an eventual replacement for Yusuf if he died or left office, Tekeda did not proffer any individual name, but suggested that a Yusuf replacement could not be a Hawiye as long as Nur Adde remained as Prime Minister. He added that, unless there is a very strong reason, the replacement would have to be a Darood, and likely a Majeerteen.

COMMENT

19. (C) While the working lunch was the first time Post had heard of the possibility of extending the TFG's transitional period, the degree of detail that Dr. Tekeda provided in terms of the compromises that such an agreement would include, with details down to the location of venues for the meetings suggests that this proposal has been significantly advanced among key stakeholders on Somalia. While the GoE continues to lament the TFG's "lack of seriousness" and slow progress, this potential extension leads Post to question the sincerity of GoE suggestions that it may pull out of Somalia.

Such a move would only further undermine Somalia's, and the TFG's fragile stability (to the extent that such exists), and serve at cross purposes with this option for providing a second wind to the TFG effort. End Comment.

YAMAMOTO